



# WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

By DAVID FIEDLER

Ellen White was a kindly soul. At least the records of history indicate that many were willing enough to call her their friend. And we can but believe she was glad to return the favor. Of course she had her special friends, those whom she had known longer, or had been closer to, or had a particular interest in. And too, she experienced the sting of friends who proved unfaithful.

She had more than her fair share of disappointments in this matter of friends. After all, the prophetic office can be rather perplexing to nonprophets. In fact, the list of those who at one time or another stumbled over their inability to comprehend the work to which she was called would most likely include all her friends. Sometimes these difficulties were easily resolved; sometimes they weren't.

Most of Mrs. White's friends recovered from their confusion, though it often required patient and persistent effort on her part to assist them. There were, however, those who allowed their differences to break the ties of friendship and Christian fellowship forever. Men such as Dudley Canright, and John Kellogg, who had known the motherly concern of this godly woman, but who later chose a path diverging from hers.

It seems a universal law in human relations that the closer the tie, the greater the potential either for joy or for sorrow. We can but imagine the pain she must have felt while watching these promising individuals—who owed so much to James and Ellen White—turn against the truths they had once loved. And turn against her.

We might consider as well the case of A. T. Jones—who as a young minister knew the support and hearty co-operation of Ellen White in a manner few others ever experienced, and yet in later years would put into print the claim that she permitted “prejudiced gossip” to influence her:

“It was not true, but she believed it. And believing it, and her mind being agitated by her believing it, the communication [Ellen White's letter] said that in the night things ‘were opened’ to her.... And the unquestionable facts in the case make it certain that on the mere prejudiced report of a man, a communication was issued as a Testimony, because of that report of ‘a member of the board,’ and of things ‘opened’ to her in



James and Ellen G. White

in the night seasons—a communication as a Testimony, whose basic premise was not in any sense nor on any ground true; and which of itself was afterward reversed, by another communication [from Ellen White].”<sup>1</sup>

The problem with Jones’ argument is that the letters he refers to—but never quotes from—just don’t say what he says they do.<sup>2</sup> A most unfortunate oversight, and a serious misrepresentation for one who had formerly worked in close connection with, and manifested firm confidence in, the subject of his pointed remarks.

But, sadly, we must all learn the lesson that not every friend is a true friend. And here the matter can become most confusing. A. T. Jones was—if nothing else—forthright and open in publishing his criticism and slander. Not that it should have been published, but at least he was willing to take the responsibility for what he said.

Not all ex-friends are so direct. Many times it is deemed expedient to retain the façade of professed friendship while one is steadily working behind the scenes to malign the one who deserves support. Such tactics are often hard to counteract because of the difficulty of pointing out what is happening without appearing to be maliciously undermining the guilty party.



A.T. Jones

Christ Himself experienced this problem with Judas. The appearance was maintained to the very end, and the Lord of glory was betrayed with a hypocritical kiss. Fortunately for us, inspiration enabled the writers of the gospels to see through this pretension and present to us a reliable and accurate account of the facts.



Dr. John Harvey Kellogg

Of course, sometimes modern-day Judases make little mistakes; they talk too much to someone who has enough integrity to speak up in defense of the one being maligned. Dr. Kellogg found that out the hard way. For years he managed to keep his hostility to Ellen White a step or two away from the open stage. He found helpers, willing assistants to carry out his schemes in their names so that he could keep a relatively clean public image.<sup>3</sup> But it seems he failed to seriously consider that he was dealing with more than human wisdom:

“I have recently received two letters from Dr. Kellogg. He strongly urges me to come to Battle Creek, offering to pay all the expenses of the journey. He thinks that I will be favorably impressed if I can see for myself the conditions existing in Battle Creek.

“But I do see matters for myself. Night after night scenes are presented before me that reveal a strange condition of things. While Dr. Kellogg has made some admissions, he has not yet gone to the root of the evils for which he has been responsible.

“At the General Conference held in Oakland [in 1903], Dr. Kellogg gave an exhibition of himself that revealed the spirit that controlled him. Long before that meeting he was presented to me as a man who understood not the spirit that controlled him. The enemy of souls had cast upon him a spell of

deception.”<sup>4</sup>

Yes, Ellen White had some interesting “friends.” And though there are but few still living who knew her personally, the story hasn’t ended yet. In recent years she has found new “friends,” and—as might be expected—they are a varied lot. Many resemble her true-hearted friends of years ago; some do not. It is the latter group to whom we will direct our attention just now.

#### Charges of Manipulation

Professing great concern for the purity of her writings, these “friends” of Ellen White have of late advanced ideas which sound disturbingly similar to the pet theories of her enemies from eight decades back. The most popular of these is the somebody-changed-the-Testimonies theory.

Of course, there are variations on the theme. It can, if one so wishes, be made to incriminate W. C. White (the prime culprit), A. G. Daniells, Uriah Smith, or W. W. Prescott.

Some people now claim not only that the Testimonies were influenced before they were published, but also that there have been hundreds, even thousands of changes since first appearing in print.

Those who advocate this incredible notion fail to explain how this all happened without Ellen White ever realizing it. They admit that they “can only wonder why the Lord did not reveal” this to her.

Could it be that there was nothing to reveal? After all, the Lord had already demonstrated His ability to direct His messenger in regard to her literary assistants. In the 1870s Mary Clough—the daughter of Ellen White’s sister, Caroline, an apparently sincere Christian though not a Seventh-day Adventist—worked for a time as a copyist for her aunt. Sister White commented that Mary is “the best copyist I can ever have.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, as time passed, and Mary declined to accept the truths to which she was exposed, the Lord indicated that she was no longer to be connected with Ellen White. Why? “Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.”<sup>6</sup>



Even more marked was the drawn-out drama of Fannie Bolton in the 1890s. Fannie was good help, except that she suffered from the idea that she could improve Ellen White’s writing. But the Lord disagreed, and told His messenger about it. After coming to a crisis point on five different occasions, and having been assigned work that precluded the possibility of her editorializing, Fannie elected to leave Mrs. White’s employ.

Was Mrs. White nonchalant about all this? Unaware? Hardly! In fact, she made her opinions very clear:

“I do not want any person who will feel it her prerogative to change the matter I shall give them into their own supposed beautiful, learned language. I want my own style to appear in my own words.”<sup>7</sup> “She is a farce.”<sup>8</sup>

## Making of None Effect

Of special interest is Fannie's claim that she was responsible for portions of what some mistakenly believed to be the "spirit of prophecy." Ellen White's response: "She could represent me and my work as her originating, that this 'beautiful expression' was hers, and that was hers, and [she would] make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God."<sup>9</sup>

Sound familiar? "The very last deception of Satan will be to make of none effect the testimony of the Spirit of God."<sup>10</sup> Now then, what are these well meaning "friends" of Ellen White really accomplishing with their charges of changes? Was Ellen White really so naive as to let these things go on behind her back? Did the Lord suddenly lose interest in His messages to us? How does one explain Ellen White's last will and testament, in which she appointed the chief "culprits" members of the Board of Directors of her estate?

"If God reproves His people through an individual, He does not leave the one corrected to guess at matters, and the message to be corrupted in reaching the person it is designed to correct. God gives the message and then takes especial care that it is not corrupted."<sup>11</sup>

Once again, just as it was years ago, it may be said of Sister White's "friends":

"Very adroitly some have been working to make of no effect the Testimonies of warning and reproof that have stood the test for half a century. At the same time, they deny doing any such thing."<sup>12</sup>

Where will it end? Without inspired foresight we cannot be certain. The probability is that souls will be lost, but not because of these "changes" any more than the "mistakes" in the Bible:

"Some look at us gravely and say, 'Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?' This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God.... All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth."<sup>13</sup>

No, the souls lost will not be because of the "changes," but because of their own loss of faith in the Lord's chosen instrumentality for leading and correcting His church. The one useful purpose such theories serve is that of providing a convenient gathering point for those not in harmony with the Lord's will. We may expect to see all manner of apostasy attracted to the proposition of doing away with certain "undesirable" portions of the spirit of prophecy. But that should be no real surprise; Ellen White's "friends" did all that years ago.

Which leaves just one question: With friends like these, who needs enemies?

*1 A. T. Jones, Some History, Some Experience, and Some Facts, p. 58*

*2 See General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, A Statement Refuting Charges Made by A. T. Jones, [1906], pp. 62, 75*

*3 Charles E. Stewart and Frank E. Belden were two of his most trusted lieutenants. See A Response to An Urgent Testimony, [The Liberty Missionary Society, Battle Creek, Michigan, 1907], and related documents in Ellen G. White Estate Document File 213*

*4 Battle Creek Letters, p. 101*

*5 Selected Messages, book 3, p. 106*

*6 Selected Messages, book 3, p. 457*

*7 Letter 127, 1895; The Fannie Bolton Story, p. 56*

*8 Letter 166, 1900; ibid., p. 96*

*9 Letter 123a, 1895 (emphasis added); ibid., p. 55*

*10 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 48*

*11 Letter 8, 1860, p. 17; Manuscript Release 401*

*12 Special Testimonies, Series B, No. 7, p. 31*

*13 Selected Messages, book 1, p. 16*